



Reed, M. (2017). Understanding and responding to negativism in schooling: the potential of the 'double move'. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 12, 63–77.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2016.10.001>

Peer reviewed version

License (if available):  
CC BY-NC-ND

Link to published version (if available):  
[10.1016/j.lcsi.2016.10.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2016.10.001)

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)  
PDF-document

This is the accepted author manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via Elsevier at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2016.10.001>. Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

## University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

### General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:  
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/>

# **Understanding and responding to negativism in schooling: the potential of the ‘double move’.**

**Malcolm Reed**

**University of Bristol, UK**

## **Abstract**

This essay considers the significance of negativism in classroom activity and its potential to provoke us to pay attention to the situation it expresses. Negativism is explored as a function of behaviour in cultural-historical theorisation of children’s development, drawing on Vygotsky’s work in child psychology. The relationship in post-Vygotskian research between negativism, crisis, the social situation of development and activity setting is reviewed. Positioning and agonistic struggles in the drama of development are explored. Hedegaard’s practice of the ‘double move’ is elaborated, with alternative yet sympathetic moves considered in conclusion for pedagogic practice in response to negativism.

**Key words:** adolescence, negativism, social situation of development, positioning, agonism, double move, pedagogy.

## **Introduction: the problem and methodological issues**

In a very short time, the child changes completely in the basic traits of his personality. Development takes on a stormy, impetuous, and sometimes catastrophic character that resembles a revolutionary course of events in both rate of the changes that are occurring and in the sense of the alterations that are made. These are turning points in the child’s development that sometimes take the form of a severe crisis. (Vygotsky, 1998, 191)

This enquiry emerges from a long-held research interest in the interactive and intersubjective practices of secondary school classrooms (for example, Webster, Beveridge & Reed, 1996; Reed 1986, Reed, 1999, 2004, 2008), therefore concerning the behaviour of adolescents. My objective is to understand what Vygotsky (1998, 18) terms ‘negativism’<sup>1</sup> and to elaborate its purpose in his work towards ‘a general theory of child development’ (Elkonin, 1998, 302). I seek also to review a range of writers in the cultural-historical tradition in order to consider possibilities for pedagogical directions that might respond to negativism. This article will take the form of an essay – that is, writing that ‘eschews the dichotomy of arts and science as two opposed and irreducible kinds of knowledge’ (Gualtieri, 1998, 50) by merging both. The essay form also allows me to review in detail source texts – many of which are not easily available<sup>2</sup> – and to quote directly, rather than summarise. Within this essay I will concentrate primarily on negativism as a principle of young

---

<sup>1</sup> This is, of course, a translation from the Russian. Vygotsky also refers to the negative phase (1998, 16).

<sup>2</sup> The essay will draw extensively on *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky*, which, although the standard reference in English for twenty years, is often not available in university education libraries, my own included.

people's development. Although negativism is certainly a feature of adult activity and some aspects of its role will be considered, it is to the understanding and extension of young people's agency as learners that we will look. The conclusions I draw offer a step towards experimental strategies that may be explored and reported through future research and publication.

### **Negativism in the classroom**

The commonly held perspective is that adolescents' negativism is simply bad behaviour and oppositional to the proper activity of learning. To the contrary, I will argue, in line with Vygotsky (1998), Yaroshevsky (1989), Bozhovich (2009), Radzikhovskii (1987), Varenne and McDermott (1998), and Hedegaard (2004, 2012), that negativism is a constituent of developmental activity and learning and offers 'a real, vital coincidence' (Vygotsky, 1998, 16).

We need to understand better what is going on, what displays and expressions of negativism suggest, and their significance to the social relations of the classroom and the institution – in short, that such negativistic acts have potential for the development of agency and are not simply insignificant and annoying distractions to learning. As teachers and educationalists we are fond of portraying pedagogical encounters in general and behaviour in particular in terms of positive and negative, as if charged with physical force like electricity, rather than charged with motive, feeling, significance and personality, as language and culture are. We also tend to leap to metaphysical and moral imperatives by equating negativism with "badness" and judging it. What happens if we dispel such other worldly affordances and suppose instead that such-and-such act of "bad behaviour" might denote in some way a constructive comment on the activity of teaching and learning? What happens if we ditch the good/bad, positive/negative dualism and detect what might be ontogenetic, dialogic and reciprocal clues in this puzzle of being and becoming that is schooling?

There is an expression in English that is deployed reactively and rhetorically by teachers, parents and responsible adults when we encounter some individual or collective action by young people that interrupts our process: "What in the world do you think you are doing?" We seem to ask the question even though we know in part the answer because we have just witnessed the action that raises the question. My guess is that equivalent expressions and variants are widespread in family and institutional settings and have been commonplace across history.

What is going on is instantly recognisable, not necessarily as a question in a semantic or syntactic sense, but as an utterance with particular functions in respect of an individual or group behaviour that runs contrary to the expected flow of teaching and learning. The force of the utterance is partly

to rebuke and partly to draw attention to the behaviour that has arrested the pedagogical flow. Therefore whatever was done or said is revealed as an irritant to the normal process. For the most part, the asking of the question is purely symbolic, to draw attention to the irritation and therefore to subdue it with the hope of moving on in harmony. However, although that may close down and negate the initial negative action that causes the interruption, it doesn't explain the action – the potential of the original negativism has not been addressed, so it remains an irritant. Think of it like an insect bite that you stop to scratch, which affords temporary relief but doesn't cure the bite, so in a few minutes you stop to scratch all over again. In classroom activity terms the same parallel applies: the pedagogic process is stopped by the teacher calling attention to the interruption, which is supposed to quell the irritation, but doesn't cure the source of the problem, so a few minutes later the interruptive action is replayed.

An irritant behaviour has always been something produced in the classroom that sticks with me long after the attempt at correction (which in my experience usually fails), leaving me with questions, and in research terms, an impetus to inquire what social knowing might be at play?

The significance of an irritant was important early in Vygotsky's career in terms of the awareness he drew from literary criticism and reapplied in the study of psychological functions:

Any work of art is naturally regarded by the psychologist as a system of irritants consciously and deliberately organised in such a way as to produce an aesthetic reaction. In analysing the structure of the irritants, we reproduce the structure of the reaction. (Vygotsky, 1987a, 40, in Yaroshevsky, 1989, 144-145)

In some respects I want us to think about incidents of adolescent behaviour as works of art, since they are often aesthetically designed to produce a perceptible and pleasing reaction – to the author of the incident and the immediate audience, that is. However, the move I suggest we need to make to negativism is not simply appreciative but dialectical – thus the move that Vygotsky describes above – that of taking apart what constitutes the 'irritant' in order to understand the cultural processes that might inform the activity expressed by that irritant. Having considered the structure of a negativistic reaction we might in turn be more understanding of how to act with it developmentally – constructively and rationally – rather than simply to negate it in a reactionary manner.

### **An overview of negativism in Vygotsky's writings**

[W]e see inner discontent, anxiety, striving for isolation, self-isolation, sometimes accompanied by a hostile attitude toward those around. The decrease in productive activity,

demise of interests, and a general anxiety constitute the main, distinct traits of the phase as a whole. The adolescent as if repels his<sup>3</sup> environment, that which was recently the subject of his interest; sometimes negativism passes more smoothly and sometimes it manifests itself in the form of disruptive activity. Together with subjective experiences (depressed state, repression, and melancholy revealed in entries in diaries and other documents that disclose the internal, intimate life of the adolescent), this phase is characterized by hostility and a tendency toward arguments and infractions of discipline. (Vygotsky, 1998, 18)

The concept and term, negativism, appears in both sections of Volume 5: Child Psychology of *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky* (1998): ‘The first [section] contains about one-half of the chapters of Vygotsky’s book, *Pedology of the Adolescent*’ and the second ‘consists of separate articles which were published after Vygotsky died in 1934 (Ratner, 1998, v). *Pedology of the Adolescent* (1930-31) was one of ‘a number of handbooks for correspondence courses’ (Vygotsky, 1998, 319) and the articles are drafts of chapters Vygotsky was preparing for a ‘book on child (developmental) psychology’ (1998, 329, 330) or stenographic transcripts of lectures delivered in the academic year 1933/34 (1998, 331 ff). Therefore, I suggest that these writings show the arguments towards a theory of child development on which Vygotsky was specifically focusing at the end of his life (Elkonin, 1998), and that they constitute a constellation of positions and ideas. The writings are produced for different audiences and institutions in different cities<sup>4</sup>. The various mentions of negativism therefore open different perspectives on transition and crisis in the development of young people. In some instances Vygotsky is reviewing the literature extant at the time (predominantly that of W. Peters and C. Bühler), in others Vygotsky is reporting investigations and experiments he and his co-researchers carried out at the Experimental-Defectology Institute in Moscow.

Two factors unite the writings: the objective that these are for pedagogical purposes; and their elaboration in terms of the co-constructive and social relationship between behaviour, personality, environment, maturation and mental development, all of which are unified in experience:

[I]n development, the unity of environmental and personality factors is achieved in a series of experiences of the child. Experience must be understood as the external relation of the child as a person to one factor or another of reality. All experience is always experience of something. There is no experience that would not be experience of something just as there is no act of consciousness that would not be an act of being conscious of something. But every experience is my experience. (Vygotsky, 1998, 294)

---

<sup>3</sup> Vygotsky is drawing on an Austrian contemporary, Charlotte Bühler, who observes girls and boys, so we should think (as elsewhere) of the use of ‘his’ to reflect both sexes.

<sup>4</sup> The chapters in the handbooks are addressed to students corresponding through the Pedagogical Faculty of the Second Moscow State University (Vygotsky, 1998, 319), whilst the lectures were delivered at the A. I. Herzen Leningrad Pedagogical Institute (1998, 331)

Here Vygotsky is thinking through in developmental terms the structural significance of the crisis in the seven-year-old child. Here is the frequently attested thesis of the interpsychological preceding and shaping the intrapsychological, and here is the concurrent objectivism that relates experience to reality. Here, as well, is the suggestion that acts of consciousness are experiences in and of reality, which, as Gonzalez Rey (2009, 2011) argues, means that objective experience is refracted through subjective consciousness. And here, which is less usual in discussion of Vygotsky's thinking, is the distinctive personalisation of experience, its autoethnographic quality, that gives individual character to people and lives: 'every experience is my experience'.

Yaroshevsky (1989), in a little-known book, *Lev Vygotsky*<sup>5</sup>, published right at the end of the Soviet period, takes a biographical approach that links the development of Vygotsky's thinking to his writings and the environments in which they were produced and which they reflect. Vygotsky did not begin his professional life as a psychologist, he became one. After graduating in law from the imperial university in Moscow in 1917, whilst also studying history and philosophy at the people's [Shanyavsky] university, at the outbreak of revolution and civil war Vygotsky returned to his hometown of Gomel in Belarus (part of the Pale of Settlement of Imperial Russia, where Jews were allowed to settle) and worked as a secondary school teacher. In 1924, he moved back to Moscow and began working 'at the People's Commissariat for Public Education' (Yaroshevsky, 1989, 98) with a responsibility for the legal protection of minors at a time when many children and young people were physically, emotionally and developmentally impaired and in crisis. Coming into a research environment in which impairment and crisis were understood scientifically in abstract, general principles, as a teacher of young people with considerable experience already, including designing a radical curriculum involving both pedagogy and pastoral care, we should never underestimate how dynamic Vygotsky's school-based experiences became in the experimental and scientific work in psychology that followed in his early career work in defectology:

The question might be asked, what was the connection between these abstract general problems and the things with which a teacher had to deal with on a daily basis as he taught a blind or deaf-and-dumb child? [...] Vygotsky pointed out [...] that their blindness or deaf-and-dumbness is not primary, since they are not felt to be disorders by the subjects themselves, but only secondary, as a result of social experience. A defect is, first of all, a social and not an organic abnormality of behaviour. (Yaroshevsky, 1989, 107)

The important precedent here is the potential for pedagogy to both inform and transform psychology, which is a Vygotskian principle and legacy continued to this day in interventions to support people with Special Needs (Kozulin & Gindis, 2007; Zaretsky, 2015).

---

<sup>5</sup> My thanks to Harry Daniels for lending me his precious, tattered copy.

Vygotsky introduces the negative stage of development in *Pedology of the Adolescent* in his critique of the 'structural psychology' of his time, that 'does not consider the social, historical nature of human interests [...] nor does it consider the historical character of the new formations that might be termed interests' (1998, 11). The double emphasis on 'historical', with its sense of experience across the lifetime of an individual within whom cultural interests develop, is particularly important to note. Vygotsky is also criticising the tendency for psychologists to ignore 'changes and shifts in the areas of interests' (1998, 14) of young people and consequently to address the mental development of the adolescent as a static, unchanging whole, with no marked difference in essence from early ages to adulthood:

In their opinion, there is simply a further improvement of the same apparatus, a further movement along one and the same line. (Vygotsky, 1998, 14)

Therefore, we need to understand negativism and the negative stages of development within an historical argument of dynamic developmental change for the individual. Vygotsky's criticism of a psychology that takes young people to be no different from mini-adults infers that we attend to young people's expression of interests and observed or reported behaviour, whether positive or negative, as necessary evidence of transition in development.

Vygotsky refers to the 'ontogenetic plan' and makes:

a distinction between the social-cultural line in the development and formation of needs of the child and the adolescent and the biological line of development of his organic tendencies. (1998, 12)

Maturation is not conceived as a static whole but differentiated in terms of sexual and social maturation, such that phases 'during the period of sexual maturation are marked not only by a series of internal organic changes, but also by a reconstruction of the whole system of relations to the environment' (1998, 15). In *Pedology of the Adolescent* the first phase of negativism occurs around the age of three and the second is the adolescent phase, roughly between the ages of 14 and 18. In the transcripts of the lectures, however, Vygotsky addresses specific ages in separate lectures as crises in development. A crisis prefigures a personal transformation. In 'The problem of age'<sup>6</sup>, he lists the 'division of age into periods' as follows:

Crisis of the newborn.  
Infancy (two months to one year).  
Crisis at age one.  
Early childhood (one to three years).  
Crisis at age three.  
Preschool age (three to seven years).  
Crisis at age seven.

---

<sup>6</sup> Not published in Vygotsky's lifetime, but one of the aforementioned chapters in draft for a book on child developmental psychology.

School age (eight to twelve years).  
Crisis at age thirteen.  
Age of puberty (fourteen to eighteen years).  
Crisis at age seventeen. (Vygotsky, 1998, 196)

Across Vygotsky's writings on child psychology, we encounter a proliferation of periods and crises. So we need to be careful and ask questions: firstly, concerning Vygotsky's intention and main line of argument regarding transition and development at any given age and situation (Blunden, 2008), and secondly, establishing what negativism might signify in this argument. Development for young people, from infancy through to adulthood, is powerfully determined by the motives and institutions in the situations any person inhabits; social situation is variable with respect to institution and its developmental imperatives across the lifetime. In the list, both biological (e.g. 'newborn', 'puberty') and institutional (e.g. 'preschool', 'school') factors are presented in relation to crisis.

One might also question whether the list ending at age of seventeen presumes that the achievement of adulthood marks a finite end to development (Scribner, 1985)? How many of us as adults have experienced times of crisis and negativism when struggling to find and maintain a lasting relationship, or raise a family, or secure or switch position or career, or come to terms with a change or decline in health, body image or sexual appetite, or to determine and live contentedly in an identity? To what extent have these negativistic feelings become acted out on ourselves and on others in our personal and professional lives?

Vygotsky's argument is stated in the opening sections of 'The problem of age' (1998, 198-199), which I summarise here. Every age period constitutes a unique relation, specific to the given age, between the child and reality, mainly the social reality, which surrounds him: the social situation of development at the given age. This situation offers the child the dynamic experiences (neoformations) that reform the child's personality across the period, as the social becomes the individual. By the end of the period, the child's structure of consciousness has changed how the child perceives reality, what one can do as activity and how one perceives one's own internal life and mental activity – the individual helps transition oneself as a new social being. The child is a different child from that of an earlier age. Ostensibly, a new social situation of development has emerged, which forms the base of the next stage of development:

[T]he social situation of development which was established in basic traits toward the beginning of any age must also change since the social situation of development is nothing other than a system of relations between the child of the given social age and social reality. And if the child changed in a radical way, it is inevitable that these relations must be reconstructed. The former situation of development disintegrates as the child develops and to



the same extent, with his development, a new situation of development unfolds in basic traits, and this must become the initial point for the subsequent age. (1998, 199)

What we need to concentrate on is the disintegration of the old and the emergence of the new situation of development, which is a new consciousness, new personality, new orientation and power in the world, new perception of the world from a new internal perspective on the world and oneself. Therefore, a revolutionary change, preceded by a crisis, is expressed by struggle. What we also need to recognise is how the new sense of the potential and limitation of the objective world is available to oneself and others – potentially, since the perspective needs first to be consciously wanted and sought (Zinchenko, 2011).

With respect for the development of children into young people and adults through education, we can look back at Vygotsky's list and consider it further in terms of gain and struggle. There is the gain of the external world beyond the womb and one's struggle to adapt, then the gain of mobility, the onset of language and consciousness and self. Then comes the gain of increasing independence from a caregiver and the expectation of self-regulation. After this the gain of schooling, the appropriation and struggle for mastery of new symbol systems and psychological tools like literacy and numeracy, and the struggle to sustain oneself in social collectives and institutions beyond the family. With the onset of puberty arrives the struggle to come to terms with a changing body and gendered self-and-othered-image. There is also a constant struggle with other-regulation at school and university expressed by competitive, systematised, academic and social assessments of attainment in concept, knowledge and practice. The worlds of education often feel abstracted from the way that understanding works out in the world of work, which seems visible yet unobtainable. Nowadays in modern economies increasing percentages of youth struggle to secure employment.

In Vygotsky's view, 'behind every negative symptom is hidden a positive content consisting usually in the transition to a new and higher form' (1998, 194). Perhaps we need to pay attention to the insertion of 'usually' in that statement and display some caution regarding its sociopolitical and socioeconomic significance nearly a century after the Soviet revolution. A crisis, after all, can sometimes be critical and complete; beset by personal and social difficulties, some people do not survive (Durkheim, 1952). Adolescents and young people today seem very aware of this social reality. Crises may run along different routes; not all neoformations are necessarily constructive with a positive regard, but they are shifts in one's sense of oneself as a social being and of one's agency – one's power to be different from what one was and to be responsible for who one is among others (Edwards, 2015; Taylor, 1985).

Vygotsky offers hope, at which we might grasp:

Development never ends its creative work, and during critical periods too, we observe constructive processes of development. Moreover, processes of involution so clearly expressed during these periods, themselves are subordinate to processes of positive structuring of the personality, depend on them directly, and with them make up an indivisible whole. (Vygotsky, 1998, 194)

But how is it that we might look within and below the behaviour of negativism and crisis and gain accounts of ‘constructive processes of development’ in the emergent personality and its social situation? The methodological problem here for both the researcher and the subject in transition is that change is not simply available from immediate and observable experiences in an objectivised external reality, but personal, mainly hidden, internal, often dramatic and emergent across time and at the back of experience. As Vygotsky puts it:

It seems to me that behind every experience, there is a real, dynamic action of the environment with respect to the child. From this point of view, the essence of every crisis is a reconstruction of the internal experience, a reconstruction that is rooted in the change of the basic factor that determines the relation of the child to the environment, specifically, in the change in needs and motives that control the behavior of the child. Growth and change in needs and motives are the least conscious and least voluntary part of the personality, and in the transition from age level to age level, new incentives and new motives develop in the child; in other words, the motive forces of his activity undergo a reevaluation. That which was essentially important, controlling, for the child becomes relative and unimportant at the subsequent stage. (Vygotsky, 1998, 296)

Accounts of inward changes in the personality caused by changes in demand in the outward environment are doubled in difficulty when that person is also going through considerable and marked bodily change and sexual maturation, as takes place across adolescence. And there is a triple difficulty when we take into account Vygotsky’s point that these crises come at times when our personality is at its lowest ebb (‘least conscious and least voluntary’) in being able to express and reason through what is taking place (Derry, 2013). To cap even the triple difficulty, when the next stage of development is gained and the crisis is over, what was so captivating and essential about the crisis fades in importance. No wonder, then, that adolescent behaviour can seem so changeable and difficult to access for a parent, caregiver or sibling within a family and home setting and for teachers, support staff and adolescent peers in the secondary school setting.

In the reversing or doubling-back that Vygotsky effects in these late writings on crisis and development in childhood and adolescence, attention previously paid to a developmental process that runs along a social-to-individual (interpsychological) locus of formation is switched to consider its return along an individual-to-social (intrapsychological) locus, with:

a completely different representation of the role of the social environment in development: interaction of the child with reality, mainly social, with an adult, is not a factor of development, not what acts from outside on what is already there, but is a source of development' (Elkonin, 1998, 299).

Vygotsky employs a particular phrase three times in his collected writings in relation to children and young people's cultural growth: 'drama of development' (1998, 190; 1987b, 176; 1994, 363<sup>7</sup>). The stepping stone for development Vygotsky introduces in 'The problem of age', which is the substantive argument behind all three instances of the phrase, comes with 'the presence of qualitative neoformations that are subject to their own rhythm and require a special measure each time' (1998, 189). These neoformations are the development of 'higher aspects of personality'. Here the metaphor that links the observable experience with the movement of development is operatic in its reference to a musical and dramatic orchestration of growing frequency and force of emergent and maturing psychological functions across the different age-periods, and the message is clear that each neoformation is not a simple recalibration of its predecessor:

If we consider higher aspects, then the result will be the reverse; the tempo and rhythm of their establishment will be minimal during the first acts of the whole drama of development and will reach a maximum in its finale. (Vygotsky, 1998, 189-190)

Recent explication of Vygotsky's re-conceptualisation of experience as *perezhivanie* and its unifying role in development makes the drama of development very clear in terms of the relationship between a person's social situation of development and their intrapsychological development:

[D]evelopment is not a linear process; it is a complex and contradictory process. These contradictions exist in a form of drama, dramatic events, collisions, and confrontations between people. "The basic principle of the functioning of higher functions (personality) is social, entailing interaction of functions, in place of interaction between people. They can be most fully developed in the form of drama" (Vygotsky, 1929/1989, p. 59). The social, interpsychological form of child's higher mental functions is shown as a dramatic interaction between people; it was conceptualized by Vygotsky as a drama that was both intrapsychologically interpreted by the child, at the same time as being experienced by the child interpsychologically (Vygotsky, 1929/1989, p. 69), resulting in the development of the child's personality. Thus, the intrapsychological consists of internalized dramatic social interactions: "The dynamic of the personality is drama" (Vygotsky, 1929/1989, p. 67). (Veresov & Fleer, 2016, 3-4)

This intrapsychological and dramatic determination of personality by experience, in which negativism and crisis are formative, is apprehended through events that are always situated and temporal. It shows how in ontogenesis what is acted out by a person seeming to reject or disrupt an event through acts of resentment or hostility, and in seeming to turn inward to unresponsive silence

---

<sup>7</sup> Citations are given in the probable order in which they were written, using editors' notes: 1932-34, 1933-34, 1934.

or brooding, is negativistic in the sense of *agonism* – of competing for the prize<sup>8</sup> of oneself, of becoming and being the subject of oneself.

In ‘The teaching about emotions’<sup>9</sup>, Vygotsky (1999, 151) argues against Kant’s assumption that ‘affects are only diseases of the soul’ and quotes appreciatively the Danish physician C.G. Lange:

“we cannot consider a person as healthy, whole, and real if he knows only how to think, recognize, and judge, but cannot suffer, be joyful, and fight, although, perhaps, these passions in some way interfere with his ability to investigate and judge.” (Lange in Vygotsky, 1999, 151)

The argument is twofold. On the one hand, Vygotsky points towards struggle and competition within development: ‘from the point of view of the development of the human mind, there is an antagonism between the intellectual and the affective life of man’ (Vygotsky, 1999, 152). On the other hand, he is arguing that to overcome a dualist separation between body and mind this antagonism is constructive in the sense that Spinoza’s monist ontology offers:

For him [Spinoza], intellect is not at all an independent force of capability. It is inseparable from the body since the attribute of thinking is inseparable from the attribute of extent. Affects move these as they move all else in human behaviour. Among these are emotional (psychophysical) acts of various levels, but no matter how various they are, their nature is unity. (Vygotsky, 1999, 263)

So agonism in development is a necessary struggle in the unity of our nature and it is in this sense that we should interpret its dramas, however negativistic. Another way of understanding this is in relation to the struggle for agency as responsibility for self (Edwards, 2015; Taylor, 1985). It would be contrary to Vygotsky’s view that negativistic behaviour lives in some interior, detached and disembodied mentality, out of reach and shut off from the ‘real world’, when it happens in real time and situation for a person whose drama is developmental in the sense of formative self-determination of agency, subjectivisation and socialisation. What we witness in the secondary school classroom is the agonistic drama of power and meaning over and for oneself. And “witness” is doubly appropriate as a term, since the adolescent needs others as audience to their drama – as corroboration that this change is properly<sup>10</sup> dramatic and significant and shared – just as they need to witness the same for their changing self.

---

<sup>8</sup> One definition and etymological root meaning of agonism; see *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

<sup>9</sup> Again, written in the Vygotsky’s late period, 1931-33 (Vygotsky, 1999, 269)

<sup>10</sup> The root meaning of ‘proper’ is somewhat faded in modern English usage (although it might be returning idiomatically in current expressions like, “She’s properly happy”), but remains in other Romance languages, for example Italian, in which *proprio* means both ‘one’s own’ and ‘genuine, authentic, real’.

It is how to connect reflexively with the experiential drama of a changeable, volatile subject-self, over which one has increasing power yet which one is increasingly expected to determine for one's own whilst being indivisibly shared with others, that we now turn.

### **Negativism in cultural-historical research after Vygotsky**

At each moment of participating in some activity, the subject, who is a one-sided expression of the activity as a whole, also reflects the ensemble of existing societal relations. (Roth, 2007, 91)

What might other cultural-historical researchers in the Vygotskian tradition offer the debate regarding the significance of negativism?

L. I. Bozhovich (1908-1981) was a brilliant Soviet child psychologist and follower of Vygotsky's method (Robbins, 2004). She takes an important step in terms of historical method by developing the unifying role of experience in activity and its relation to the way in which the child apprehends the social situation of development:

[I]n order to understand just how particular new traits form in children, a distinction must be drawn between the objective position children occupy in life and their own "internal position," that is, how they themselves – due to the history of their development, which has given them a particular experience and particular traits – feel about everything around them and, first and foremost, about their position and the demands that it makes of them. Analysis of children's objective position gives us an opportunity to understand the system of demands that the environment makes of them, while study of "internal position" allows us to understand the system of their own needs and impulses. (Bozhovich, 2009, 82)

The distinction between 'objective position' and 'internal position' should not be understood as two mutually exclusive positions in separate external and internal worlds. In life one experiences oneself as objectified through activity whilst one attempts subjectively to gain control of one's position oneself in relation to one's consciousness of being objectified and how this affects one. This drama of control is by nature and definition agonistic. The internal position is a cultural-historical development of consciousness in personality because we develop it within social activity through the relation of immediate with past experience.

As Robbins proposes, 'internal positioning [...] can be understood as a "third level"'<sup>11</sup> (2004, 4), quoting Bozhovich:

in comparing individuals, it is not the primary or even the secondary relationships within the integral system of consciousness that are important, but rather the relationships that exist on

---

<sup>11</sup> Robbins actually writes, "'third level" or "third space"' (2004, 4); I would argue that to separate 'level' from 'space' is an unnecessary dualism, given that the event of experience is always immediate and indivisible in time and place except in levels of relation of the person to their experience.

some third level and the way the individual himself makes use of his own capacities, that is, the place they occupy in his personality and activity. (Bozhovich, 1977, 14)

Internal position, therefore, expresses in the same situated event (because historically the pasts of our being are always lived in the present) a third level of a person's understanding of the positions one has taken agonistically in one's feeling about two contributory levels: 1) how within a present social situation of development one is positioned by others and by oneself; 2) how in past social situations of development one has been positioned by others and by oneself.

It is on this third level of internal position that we should seek to engage with the person, since it is here that one 'makes use of his own capacities' (*ibid*, 1977, 14), which is the historical, self-determining, agential position that unifies engagement with self and others, past and present. Furthermore, if we expand on the potential of 'us' in Bozhovich's suggestion that 'analysis of children's objective position gives us an opportunity to understand' (*ibid*, 2009, 82), it also suggests that a range of perceptions regarding a person's internal position may be sought from family, friends and peers, as well as from education and health professionals.

However, we need to be careful to recognise that activity and position are unitary, not distinct:

But the concept of activity cannot be divorced from the concept of position, since activity itself determines children's position within the environment and is only a means for satisfying the needs associated with this position. (Bozhovich, 2009, 84)

What constitutes position is activity: how a person acts, and how she or he expresses their sense of their activity in any environment, are foremost 'means for satisfying the needs associated with this position'. Bozhovich is pointing out the bind that ties both objective position and internal position not necessarily to truthful self-revelation but to need-satisfaction: by its nature, positioning is interpretivistic. Furthermore, Bozhovich differs with Leont'ev (1981) in understanding the temporality of a social situation of development. Whilst she agrees that 'external and internal conditions are merged in a complex unity' (Bozhovich, 2009, 83), she extends the temporality of analysis beyond Leont'ev's present occasion and situation in order to take into account past experience. This attention to a formative history is important to cultural-historical research since, as Daniels points out, 'In many studies the term 'subject perspective' is used which arguably infers subject position but does little to illuminate the formative processes that gave rise to this perspective' (2007, 97). Bozhovich makes a distinction that leads the potential for analysis beyond accounts of the immediate, supposedly objectivized social situation of a person and into interpretivistic, subjectivised accounts of one's lifeworld, nuanced and refracted by past and present experience. Such a view takes analysis into the elicitation and interpretation of narratives and what

Bruner calls ‘the idiosyncratic dramatic-historical patterns of human experience’ (2005, 21).

The way young people manage themselves through their social and pedagogic relations within the classroom could usefully be explored through the idea of the internal position and the narratives it might offer. Provided that it is sought in an ethically responsible manner, there is scope here for research and close analysis of how, for example, an adolescent talks about him- and herself in relation to a specific event and in relation to specific situations of schooling and if and how an internal position is expressed, then how that internal position may be encouraged in expression and how and why it might change. As Roth argues: ‘Publicly visible actions serve as the ground of recognizing in the other another self that recognizes in me its corresponding other’ (2007, 90). Such accounts might be sought and similarly encouraged and compared with family, peers and teachers.

Distinct from consideration of young people’s internal position for research purposes, the same encouragement to talk about oneself is often the direction that sensitive teaching takes when finding out more about a critical event, such as a crisis of understanding for a person and/or a group during a process of instruction, or a crisis of behaviour in a classroom activity.

However, as Radzikhovskii (1987) explores, the way in which individuals internalise and externalise social action is easy to assert and complex to explain, especially when one moves from a structural description of mechanism to a cultural-historical description of developmental process over time. What is internalised (and subsequently externalised) as a base structure is ‘joint activity’ between subjects orientated to each other and to social world objects through the play of signs. The various levels and degrees of difference of relation, experience and meaning that fuse (to create understanding) and then unfold (to express response) in every social and semiotic action of communication manifest restraint as well as affordance on ontogenetic development. Radzikhovskii (1987) borrows from Bakhtin (1979) the notion of the limits (boundaries, finitude) of any utterance, so ‘limit’ is a powerful concept to express the restraints on development through activity:

But the limit of a social act, its link to the act of another person, alters radically the entire system of the act and introduces a social element into its very definition. Hence, a sign must also occupy an important place in the structure of an act, i.e., a sign addressed to an “other” and eliciting an act in response that serves as the completion of that particular act. (Radzikhovskii, 1987, 95)

We need, therefore, to consider negativism in classroom activity closely in terms of the semiotic determinants of social reality that are presented. Bozhovich is directly relating activity to position in a determinant sense, such that the child’s activity is determined by and expressive of position, but she also recognises a person’s account of one’s past in the present, so that analysis of activity has an

historical and narrative propensity. Radzikhovskii deconstructs activity in ontogenesis as a cultural-historical process to reveal its limits as well as its affordances, with a key limitation or restraint being that acts are uttered, expressed and understood as signs, as meaning-giving and meaning-made. Negativism in activity does not simply affect the person or group displaying it; it also expresses limits on immediate others and affects them. We all position ourselves internally through activity, so what Radzikhovski offers is the opportunity to explore and reflect on how particular acts of negativism work to give meaning to others and their internal positions whilst making meaning for the initiator(s). There are dialogues to be had between the various internal positions around specific acts and incidences of repeated acts, if they are elicited.

So the issue here is not to leap to common-sense and simplistic determinants, such as a young person's background, or social status, but to interrogate how one becomes positioned and limited as a learner and as a person – not, therefore, what is the activity one experiences and engages in, but what is the activity of positioning and limitation that is taking place? This, I suggest, requires attention to the events of the immediate situation and to the potential accounts, which will likely be narrative in form, through which subjects speak of their situation. Methodologically-speaking, we are leading towards ethnographic interpretations of classroom activity.

The classic text of classroom ethnography that seeks to understand the activity of positioning is Varenne and McDermott's *Successful Failure: The school America builds*:

It is not so much that culture determines individual behavior as it arranges for the situated interpretation of behaviour. (Varenne and McDermott, 1998,122)

Again and again Varenne and McDermott and their co-researchers observe, witness and unpick how various children position themselves relationally to peers and adults and “acquire” a disability or competence or capacity accordingly. Children are enculturated with disabilities because of immediate and wider cultural forces. These are the professional gazes of teachers and psychologists, the social ambitions and influence of parents, the authors and instigators of curriculum and examination, and the national narratives that define (and therefore limit) the opportunities afforded by an education.

Poddiakov (2005) argues that education is not necessarily benign and improving and that cultural activity is both progressive and restrictive:

The idea of complex relations between stimulation of development and its inhibition, and advantages and detriment caused by certain types of social interactions in teaching/learning (Poddiakov, 2005, 228)



Hedegaard (2012) points out the multiplicity of social situations of development that can arise in a single activity setting like a classroom or lesson:

Activity settings are not the single person's settings, but an activity setting is conceptualized as societal traditions realized within an institutional practice as concrete historical events. Seen from a specific person's perspective, an activity setting is a person's social situation. Different persons in the same activity setting can experience different social situations (Hedegaard, 2012, 132)

For our purposes of understanding negativism in adolescents' development, Hedegaard makes the important link between crisis in a life and contradictions in motives in an activity setting:

Crises in children's life can then be seen as something necessary, reflecting contradictions between a child's different motives or between a child's motives and the institutions or another person's demands (Hedegaard, 2005, 2011). Crises can become detrimental if the caregivers do not support the child's capabilities to move forward to new motives and competences. Development is more than learning new competencies or acquiring new motives. Development can be seen when children's social relations to other persons are reorganized in *all* the different practices the child attends. (Hedegaard, 2012, 136-137)

A crisis is an extreme phenomenon, and we should be cautious in assuming that all expressions of negativism are acts of crisis, since clearly they are not. Young people, like adults, however, are just as capable of hiding upset as we are capable of employing it for effect, so there are many problems with any neat and easy equation of negativism with crisis. If crisis is an inevitable concomitant of the development of social being then what it signals, and what negativism signals, are feelings of limitation in terms of ability to act: the very expression of contradiction in the immediate social situation and relations in which a person is inscribed. In Hedegaard's words above, 'crises can become detrimental', which is not the same statement as 'all crises are detrimental'. What makes the difference is to 'support the child's capabilities to move forward to new motives and competences'. I want to stress how Hedegaard predicates 'the child's capabilities' here, which is to say that this whole cycle of expressed negativism and the possibility of response is fruitful only in terms of re-engagement of the person with the activity of the moment in its setting with a progressed sense of agency and internal position.

Long ago, A. R. Luria, reporting research in collaboration with Vygotsky, denied the efficacy of the two most prevalent responses to negative behaviour in children: the idea that an individual can correct their attitude by will-power alone (in English the exhortation to a school pupil would be, "Get a grip!" or "Sort yourself out!"), and the idea that behaviour can be changed by punishment or reward. In the first instance, Luria (1932/1960, 401) writes:

Many observations support our view that the consideration of the voluntary act as accomplished by "will-power" is a myth, and that the human cannot by direct force control his behaviour any more than "a shadow can carry stones."

In the second instance:

In order to introduce in the child maximum motives it is only necessary to offer rewards or threaten punishment. These are methods of the old school of pedagogy. They have both been used in our experiments, without perceptible results.

[...] Such stimuli increased the motives of the child, but there was no improvement in his actions. The comparatively slight improvement seen in a few of the subjects could be attained without rewards or punishment, but by using other motives, such as competition, or by having the child give his attention to the experiment. (Luria, 1932/1960, 405)

Let us note in the first instance the importance of some mediating influence in the shape of word or sign as a tool by which we control our behaviour, and in the second instance the similar mediation of motives translated into action. This points to the important conclusion for pedagogical development that any activity has the potential to answer its own problems – that negativism is an affective expression of overlooked yet burgeoning agency. A child doesn't behave appropriately during one of Vygotsky and Luria's experiments, so what do they do? Have the child 'give his attention to the experiment' – that is, include him in the motivation to experiment. This signals an important pedagogical shift in agential relations between teachers and learners:

The change in view from the child as a recipient in learning situations to the child as a participant in learning, and the change in view from learning as a cognitive process to an activity leads to new forms of teaching practice. Each child becomes involved in a reciprocal process in which his/her motives and personality plays a part in the interaction with the other persons in the classroom – the teacher and their classmates. This has to be considered in teaching. The problem is then to create classroom teaching for the whole group of children, a problem that is possible to solve through children's cooperation in investigation of problems that are both interesting for the children and relevant for the subject matter area taught. (Hedegaard, 2004, 30)

### **The practice of the double move**

In a critical period, the object of intervention should not be the content of a particular age, but the way the relations among the contents of the different ages are represented to the child. (El'konin, 1993, 63)

Mariane Hedegaard has proposed the term 'double move' to formulate 'a method of teaching' (1990, 180) that changes our view of the development of learning from 'a cognitive process to an activity' (2004, 30). The double move has developed over iterations of pedagogic experiments she has carried out in school and community settings within and beyond Denmark, often working in multi-ethnic classrooms. In the following summary, I will draw on a range of publications in which the double move has been proposed and explored (Hedegaard, 1990, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2009; Hedegaard & Chaiklin, 2005).

The double move originates in Vygotsky's experimental method of dual stimulation:

Vygotsky was concerned to study human functioning as it developed rather than considering functions that had developed. The essence of his 'dual stimulation' approach is that subjects are placed in a situation in which a problem is identified and they are also provided with the tools with which to solve the problem or means by which they can construct tools to solve the problem. The crucial element in a Vygotskian dual stimulation event is the co-occurrence of both the problem and tools with which to engage with that problem. (Daniels, 2011, 158)

Dual stimulation underlies the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is essentially a diagnostic tool (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986, 1998; Chaiklin, 2003) that generates and explores the difference between a child's unassisted and assisted competence on a given problem:

This zone can be characterized as a developmental room within which children's cognition and interests develop through working on situated problems in interaction with a more competent person. (Hedegaard, 1998, 118)

Hedegaard proposes the double move as a method of teaching and learning within a ZPD that is directly shaped by the institution of school and the cultural-historical practices and contents of schooling in a given society:

The lower level of the ZPD is delineated by the traditions of practice that have characterized the students' lives. The upper level is delineated by the possibilities of practices.

Teaching within the ZPD can be characterized as a double move between the students' experience and their exposure to theoretical concepts. The goal of teaching within the ZPD is to use subject-matter knowledge to support the students in their acquisition of theoretical concepts and motives. In the double move approach, the process of instruction runs as a double move between the teacher's model of the subject-matter concepts of a problem area and the student's everyday knowledge. The teacher guides the learning activity both from the perspective of the general concepts and from the perspective of engaging students in "situated" problems that are meaningful in relation to their developmental stage and life situations. The suggestion for this type of teaching and learning in school points to forms of cooperation between master and learner and between learners that are guided by the subject-matter areas deemed important for them to acquire, as well as to finding opportunities for personality formation where the children learn to evaluate both knowledge and their own capacities. (Hedegaard, 1998, 120-121)

Hedegaard (1998, 1999) construes previous proposals within the Vygotskian tradition of what thinking entails, how teaching approaches develop learners' cognition and what forms of knowledge are engaged, in order to arrive at 'a cultural-historical approach' (1999, 24) within which she locates her practice. From these precedents Hedegaard integrates with the cultural-historical approach two aspects:

the social aspect of thinking and its situated and distributed character being formed by everyday practice as well as the communicative and argumentative character of the thinking process. The integration of these characteristics leads to a characterization of thinking as a process guided by procedures of social practices, either in daily life or in professional life, with dialogue and argumentation as central activities. (1999, 25)

Hedegaard draws on the applied work of the Russian generation of psychologists and educationalists that followed Vygotsky, specifically from V.V. Davydov and D.B. El'konin, who founded the experimental school No. 91 in Moscow in 1959, where they 'conducted fundamental research designed to identify the real particular characteristics of age and capabilities of thinking in primary schoolchildren, to study the laws of formation of their learning activity, to disclose the logical-psychological presuppositions for composing teaching programs' (Rubtsov, 2005, 5).

We are connected, therefore, with an intellectual tradition that does not abstract theory from practice and researches within the institutional setting of the school. Curriculum and instructional content are formulated within the classroom along cultural-historical understandings of children's development through organised teaching-learning activity:

The task of instruction is to develop scientific concepts so that they have the concrete specificity and ease of application of everyday concepts, while everyday concepts are drawn into a scientific system of concepts. Subject-matter knowledge thereby becomes integrated with the content of the tasks and situations in the child's life outside of school and can develop into functional conceptual tools for the child. (Hedegaard & Chaiklin, 2005, 36)

Dialogue, argumentation and experimentation are fundamental to the activity of teaching and learning in Hedegaard's tradition of practice. Motivation to learn becomes culturally generated, so that the motives that lead inquiry and understanding are discovered and appropriated from the collective and social activity of inquiry. Motives are developed 'through acquisition of cultural values of institutionalized practices, such as a motive for intellectual discourse, a motive for musical experience, a motive for being believed and trusted by friends' (Hedegaard & Chaiklin, 2005, 64). Such motivation is the consequence of what Davydov (1999, 130) terms 'theoretical consciousness', which spans the contours of cultural knowing and is not simply reducible to a specific discipline or school subject:

First of all, theoretical consciousness and thinking is realized in an action-performance-visual, visual-image, and verbal-discursive form. Second, it is represented in the sciences and arts, moral practices and law. Third, it consists in humans' rational attitudes to real life, in humans' ability to resolve rationally both abstract and practical everyday tasks. Here, we do not mean just *any* tasks, but the ones which, in order to be solved, require from humans (including, of course, school children) the ability to distinguish between internal and external, appearance and essential. It is well-known that external appearances of things differ from the internal core of things. Only dialectical consciousness and thinking can resolve these conflicts. Therefore, the commonly used term *theoretical thinking* is, at the same time, *dialectical thinking*. Theoretical consciousness directs the attention of humans toward the need to conceive of one's own cognitive actions, to consider knowledge itself. In philosophical terms this is referred to as reflection.

We have called theoretical consciousness and thinking *dialectical* or *reasonable* (as compared with rational or intellectual). The task of studying this *type* of consciousness and thinking has a very high philosophical and psychological significance. Its solution allowed us to formulate the concept of 'learning activity', which may exist only where dialectical (theoretical) consciousness and thinking have developed and are functioning. (Davydov, 1999, 130-131)

In order to practise the double move, therefore, cultural-historical tradition establishes certain specific institutional and pedagogical conditions for learning activity. Theoretical consciousness in Davydov's (1999) explanation ranges across modes of meaning-making and areas of academic discipline; it is necessarily dialectical, reflective and reasonable. This type of theoretical consciousness and thinking is not circumscribed by science or mathematics and extends into the arts, ethics and jurisprudence. It is another way of describing higher-order thinking and higher psychological processes (Vygotsky, 1978). We cannot separate the double move from an actual curriculum as practised in an actual institution with respect for the cultural identities and societal positionings of an actual group of learners, which is why we might conceive instead of a practicum. Furthermore, the selection and focusing of knowledge in such a practicum does not stem from a conception of general knowledge but from very careful specification, by those who teach for those who are learning, of how 'collective knowledge' in any discipline operates as 'societal forms of knowledge' as 'generated in daily situations in many different types of institutions by the tasks and problems that characterize these institutions' (Hedegaard, 1999, 26).

### **Applicability of the double move to counter negativism**

It may seem as if the turn in the argument I am about to make suggests that the previous section, with its focus on the double move and its practical attention to constructive learning development, is something of a blind alley. In advance of the argument I need to state that double move pedagogy has a great deal to offer, and in supportive conditions of educational development should be given serious consideration. However, the circumstances in England in which I operate currently as classroom researcher and participating teacher do not lend much opportunity to practitioners to work creatively and experimentally. Nor is there much hope that this situation will change in the immediate future. We live through an era of incessant and extreme political and governmental interference in curriculum design and control of pedagogy in the state sector, such that day-to-day survival for the teachers of English I work alongside means adjusting rapidly and precisely to whatever *diktat* of structural change in curriculum, assessment and examination is being enforced in any given academic year, knowing that compliance will be tested through a rapid and unforgiving

inspection regime. Changes in state education regulations in the United Kingdom<sup>12</sup> are annual and often multiple.

Pedagogy, like all activity, is positioned and constrained in its development by its social situation. That social situation is bounded by and refracted through the needs of local communities, social institutions, cultural and historical traditions and imperatives at regional, national and international levels. Hedegaard explains how a 'child's life always involves participating in a concrete institutional practices realized by activities and interactions among multiple participants, in recurrent everyday settings', with activity conceptualised in three planes: the 'formal societal', the 'general institutional', and the 'specific' (2012, 129-130). What pertains to a child's life and activity pertains similarly to a teacher, or any person, so there are as many variable opportunities and constraints to development as there are opportunities and constraints to the social situations that produce development. What we mean by agency for an individual, has, in a cultural-historical account, to take into consideration the social institutions and agencies in relation to which individual agency is dialectically developed, since the social situation of development creates social positioning within internal positioning:

Bernstein (1990, 13) used the concept of social positioning to refer to the establishing of a specific relation to other subjects and to the creating of specific relationships within subjects. [...] He relates social positioning to the formation mental dispositions in terms of the identity's relation to the distribution of labour in society. (Daniels, 2007, 97)

It is not difficult to understand, therefore, that pedagogical experimentation in the Davydov-El'konin-Hedegaard tradition of double move pedagogy requires a freedom and an institution in which to do so. The University of Chicago Primary School (later known as the Laboratory School) founded in 1896 by John Dewey (Knoll, 2014), the Experimental School No. 91 in Moscow supported<sup>13</sup> by the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences (APS) of the USSR (Rubtsov, 2005; Zinchenko, 2011), and the Laboratory of Human Development at Harvard (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), all reflect socio-political situations and arrangements that are by no means universal, or even local.

In the British context, in which constraints on experimentation far outweigh opportunities, I would argue that double move pedagogy, in the radical model explained previously, is not achievable at present in state education. Neither Davydov nor Hedegaard address specifically negativism in

---

<sup>12</sup> The United Kingdom has different educational policy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with the brunt of change borne by England, which has 84% of the UK total population of 64.1 million people (Office for National Statistics, 2015). <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/compendiums/compendium-of-uk-statistics/population-and-migration/index.html>

<sup>13</sup> As Zinchenko (2011, 19) points out, Davydov and El'konin also suffered 'aggression and shameful sanctions' from within the APS, so independence is always relative to immediate political situation.

learning development, although each is acutely aware how the wrong kind of learning activity formulation can hold back learning development and instigate negative response. There remains a gap in the discussion, therefore, that shows how negativism and crisis at the ontogenetic level relate to the specific plane of concrete institutional practices in Hedegaard's terms. At the other end of the social continuum from that of the individual another gap opens when we begin to see how social situations of development for pedagogical practice and experimentation are constrained by negativism and crisis on formal societal and general institutional planes. These wider political forces may presage neoformations and potential revolutions in the system, but this is a matter of future conjecture.

The double move itself is a development of a theoretical tradition put into practice:

Davydov pitted theoretical (reasoned) thinking against empirical (rational) thinking and directed his efforts at working out a conceptual framework and techniques of learning activity that would meet the tasks of forming theoretical thinking in schoolchildren. (Zinchenko, 2011, 19)

The double move, therefore, has its particular history of development with respect for specific kinds of institutions operating in specific socio-political situations. I am suggesting, in response to the way pedagogy in the UK state education sector is currently codified and controlled (Daniels, 2004), that where different socio-political situations pertain, we might think about the possibility of turning back the clock on the double move's developmental history. If we accept that we might not be in a social position as agents of pedagogy to take the double move *prêt à porter* as a solution in its established form, we might still explore some of the potential within the theories of development stimulated by the proponents of cultural-historical practice concerning schoolchildren and adolescents discussed in this essay. When Hedegaard states, 'Teaching within the ZPD can be characterized as a double move between the students' *experience* and their exposure to theoretical concepts' (1998, 120, my emphasis), could we not make a link with theoretical concepts of psychology – the logos of the psyche – by concentrating on the historical meaning of *experience* in social development and making double moves to bring those experiential actions to mind? If negativism expresses changes and reconstructions taking place in a young person's internal development through experience of activity in the situation of some institution (e.g. family, play group, peer and/or friendship group, school, religious organisation, form of labour, and so on) then might we not respond reflexively to shifts and turns of positioning in that person's management of socio-environmental relations? What happens, then, if we explore how students' negativism offers a double-face of experience – its agonism of internal positioning through the affects of social

positioning in social relations and its correspondent positioning of others? Is there not in any behaviour a double move on experience in a dialectic of relation between self and other?

The double move on the ways we understand ourselves as people with a specificity and fluidity of psychical organization is Vygotsky's legacy:

Social environment is not considered by [Vygotsky] as a given, but as something organized in the course of human relationships. Social facts are not objective given 'entities' which influence development as objective influences; they will take on different emotional values for development as result of the person's actual psychical organization. Social facts become relevant for development by their transformations into emotional states, a process that takes place by their refraction through the person's psychical organization. (Gonzalez Rey, 2009, 68-69)

## Conclusion

[E]motional experience really does reflect how satisfied a subject is in relation to the surrounding social environment and thus fulfills an extremely important function: it "informs" people what their relationship to the environment is and correspondingly orients their behavior, impelling them to act in such a way as to minimize or eliminate any discord that may emerge. (Bozhovich, 2009, 74)

Negativism at macro-political levels is beyond reach of change through individual action, although more is needed from cultural-historical research to address the way national agencies, such as prescriptive, state-controlled curriculum councils and inspection regimes, restrict micro-political levels of schooling and constrain agency for learners and teachers. Freedom to experiment with pedagogy personalises and localises how learning and teaching develop problematisation, reflection and reasoning in ways that allow learners to experience, employ, enjoy and contribute towards the practices of theoretical conceptualisation. Double moves promise to expand our human capability to define ourselves exploratively and break the limits of our social situations because they negotiate development dialectically between co-operative subjects who become exponentially more (doubled, squared) than singular, individual entities and lone subjects as a consequence. As Stetsenko argues:

Learning then appears as the pathway to creating one's identity by finding one's place among other people and, ultimately, finding a way to contribute to the continuous flow of sociocultural practices. (2008, 487)

On the small scale and day-to-day there is much that we can do to make double moves on emotional experience in Bozhovich's sense (2009, above) among subjects of schooling – putting young people first, yet not overlooking ourselves. Objective positions and internal positions are related and they can be attended to through observation, discussion and opportunities to reflect, so long as positioning is mutually recognised as purposive and normal in everyone's development. Negativism



needs to be welcomed as a constructive opportunity – of how one deals with one's self in any situation by expressing and understanding ourselves expressed, of how and who one feels one is and how and who one is becoming in one's own and others' minds.

Radzikhovskii (1987) invites us to consider the negativistic expression and action as a sign with boundaries that can be opened up dialectically by inquiring how any deed necessarily limits oneself and others. "How did you do that?" and "Why did you do that?" help reflection and reconsideration to double back on agential and agonistic choices in order to repurpose them. The consequence of some negativistic acts becomes being held responsible for them by being responsive to their affect on oneself and others, rather than being punished. In any drama of development, the antagonist and the protagonist make each other's capability and both are heroes of sorts; in any competition the winner can be the one who understands best how not to make the wrong move and the loser the one who did not anticipate the consequence of their action, especially to double back on them. If development is a drama then school is the theatre in which we should learn how we act our social selves.

From Hedegaard (2012) we learn how a crisis reveals the tensions that a subject can no longer contain when previous arrangements of one's life become unstable because motives, demands and expectations are changing, perhaps to incorporate new social relations and institutions. For a young person, help is needed to learn how to become capable in the practices of these new arrangements – learning is necessarily reciprocated on others' assistance and help with conceptualisation – whilst simultaneously requiring practical action in order to learn how to help be oneself. The curriculum is theoretical consciousness (Davydov, 1999) that is gained through reasoning that one learns for oneself with others – it is not a recipe of knowledge for users but a model of practice that we adapt. There is much here to be asked about just how learners' negativisms express crises of passivity of being trapped in schooling experiences which expect young people to learn recipes for thought without engaging them in the preparation of thought's food. By far the greatest incidence of negative behaviour in any classroom emerges when learners have little to do but listen to instruction that is out of gear with practical activity. This is akin to the starvation of agency. Learners' negativistic behaviours often express the problem with an immediate situation of schooling by criticising directly how agency is being enslaved rather than liberated. The double move implies that we direct attention to the development of a practicum rather than a curriculum in any classroom, so teachers examine what a lesson situation offers as opportunity for learners to own practice by reading learner behaviour as an index of activity – that is, negative behaviour may point up that agency is being incapacitated.

The consequence of negativism, therefore, is not to revisit negativism on an offence but to make deliberate the double moves that develop conceptualisation of one's psychical organisation (Gonzalez Rey, 2009) – by coming to know oneself through reason and reciprocity as a cultural-historical agent of being. Despite the fact that there is no methodological mainline to the truth of any situation, there is still the potential to garner a range of accounts of positioning from subjects within activity. Such an environment- and activity-sensitive interpretive accounting increases the possibility that learners, teachers and researchers understand negativism and crisis in a developmental history in which one gives and is given positions in being and becoming. We might push ourselves professionally and methodologically to understand the creative and constructive relevance of positioning that negativistic expression and behaviour refract. We can certainly try to help young people to address their sense of internal position, not as grievance but as subjective interpretation of objective reality. We might also help the person and ourselves to understand how every individual's interpretation has concomitant social and collective meaning by drawing in the perceptions of immediate others, with the proviso that the primary subject's sense of internal position should carry some considerable weight in the balance of perceptions so that the developmental objective for all concerned becomes the opening up of productive dialogues that are intent on 'positive structuring of personality' within activity (Vygotsky, 1998, 194).

If negativism has a design and is intentional on the side of the person who expresses it, then it offers a potential opening for a double move because we can double back to reflect on that intention and that design. Negativism of itself reflects back on immediate activity in its setting and expresses a position and a perspective: an utterance is opening. The person expressing negativism has a history of being positioned in this activity setting, institution and culture; with this history of being comes a history of feeling. Negativism acts out the feeling of social being.

In a pedagogic situation, the utterance that is opening in an act of negativism may reflect on the teacher, because the teacher is historically and actually constituted in most school settings as the person who empowers agency. A power of agency is being claimed from the person who is believed to have the most power to grant agency. However, the negativism does not necessarily express that the teacher is the problem; instead it positions the teacher as the potential solver of the problem. What is being uttered as negativism is an opening even though it may be expressed in terms of cause and blame. What is being uttered is also, in the same instant, designed and expressed as a potential opening to others in the immediate setting and it may be that some of these people are the cause of the problem, or it may not. The opening is a potential door in utterance and being.

There are many pedagogic moves made in any classroom and we need to study them. Double moves keep the specific utterance open for collective and personal exploration through reflection of what in the immediate world is happening. Some problems seem to change and become more surmountable when potential is released through pedagogic moves for taking up agential positions and voices that allow us to work together on our understanding. It remains the case that what we learn to do for ourselves must first be available to us from our immediate social world and setting. It remains the case that such availability is not enough simply as an opportunity and needs assistance in becoming appropriated and practised and experienced and uttered and storied so successfully that we can reclaim that understanding. We most need help to feel our way forward when dark times fall in our lives.

## List of references

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1979) *The Aesthetics of Verbal Creativity*, Moscow: Iskusstvo.
- Bernstein, B. (1990). *The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse, Volume IV: Class, Codes and Control*, London: Routledge.
- Blunden, A. (2008) Vygotsky's unfinished theory of child development.  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/comment/vygotsky-on-development.pdf>
- Bozhovich, L. I. (1977) The concept of the cultural-historical development of the mind and its prospects. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 16(1), 5–22.
- Bozhovich, L. I. (2009) The social situation of child development. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 47(4), 59–86.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by nature and design*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. (2005) Celebrating Geertzian interpretivism. In: *Clifford Geertz by His Colleagues* C. Geertz, R. A. Shweder & B. Good (Eds), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 20-23.
- Chaiklin, S. (2003) The zone of proximal development in Vygotsky's analysis of learning and instruction. In: *Vygotsky's Educational Theory in Cultural Context* A. Kozulin, B. Gindis, V. Ageyev & S. Miller (Eds), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 39-64.
- Daniels, H. (2004) Activity theory, discourse and Bernstein. *Educational Review*, 56(2), 121-132.
- Daniels, H. (2007) Discourse and identity in Cultural–Historical Activity Theory: A response. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 46, 94–99.
- Daniels, H. (2011) Support for children and schools through cultural intervention. In: *Vygotsky and Special Needs Education: Rethinking support for children and schools* H. Daniels & M. Hedegaard

- (Eds), London: Continuum, 153-172.
- Davydov, V. V. (1999) What is real learning activity? In: *Learning Activity and Development* M. Hedegaard & J. Lompscher (Eds). Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 123-138.
- Derry, J. (2013) *Vygotsky, Philosophy and Education*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.
- Edwards, A. (2015) Recognising and realising teachers' professional agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), 779-784.
- Durkheim, E. (1952) *Suicide: A study in sociology* G. Simpson (Ed), J.A. Spaulding and G. Simpson (Trans), London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- El'konin, B. D. (1993) The crisis of childhood and foundations for designing forms of child development. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 31(3), 56-71.
- Elkonin, D. B. (1998) Epilogue. In: *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky: Volume 5: Child Psychology* R. W. Rieber (Ed), M. J. Hall (Trans), New York: Plenum, 297-317.
- Gonzalez Rey, F. L. (2009) Historical relevance of Vygotsky's work: Its significance for a new approach to the problem of subjectivity in psychology. *Outlines*, 1, 59-73.
- Gonzalez Rey, F. L. (2011) A re-examination of defining moments in Vygotsky's work and their implications for his continuing legacy, *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 18(3), 257-275.
- Gualtieri, E. (1998) The essay as form: Virginia Woolf and the literary tradition. *Textual Practice*, 12(1), 49-67.
- Hedegaard, M. (1990) The zone of proximal development as basis for instruction. In: L. C. Moll (Ed.) *Vygotsky and Education: Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 171-195.
- Hedegaard, M. (1996) How instruction influences children's concepts of evolution. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 3(1), 11-24.
- Hedegaard, M. (1998) Situated learning and cognition: Theoretical learning and cognition. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, (5)2, 114-126.
- Hedegaard, M. (1999) The Influence of Societal Knowledge Traditions on Children's Thinking and Conceptual Development. In: *Learning Activity and Development* M. Hedegaard & J. Lompscher (Eds), Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 22-50.
- Hedegaard, M. (2001) A new approach to learning in classrooms. Center for Kulturforskning: Aarhus Universitet, 1-27.
- Hedegaard, M. (2004) A cultural-historical approach to learning in classrooms. *Outlines*, 1(1), 21-34.
- Hedegaard, M. (2005). Strategies for dealing with conflicts in value positions between home and school: Influence on ethnic minority student's development of motives and identity. *Culture & Psychology*, 11, 187-205.

- Hedegaard, M. (2008) Children's learning through participation in institutional practices: A model from the perspective of cultural-historical psychology. In: *The Transformation of Learning: Advances in cultural-historical activity theory* B. Van Oers, W. Wardekker, E. Elbers & R. Van der Veer (Eds), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 294-318.
- Hedegaard, M. (2009) Children's development from a cultural-historical approach: Children's activity in everyday local settings as foundation for their development. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 16(1), 64—82.
- Hedegaard, M. (2011). How children's everyday activities connects across different institutional practices. The relation between institutional practices and children's motives. In: *Motives in children and young peoples development: Cultural historical perspectives* M. Hedegaard, A. Edwards, & M. Flear (Eds.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 9–27.
- Hedegaard, M. (2012): Analyzing children's learning and development in everyday settings from a cultural-historical wholeness approach. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 19(2), 127-138.
- Hedegaard, M. & Chaiklin, S. (2005) *Radical-Local Teaching and Learning: A cultural-historical approach*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.
- Knoll, M. (2014) Laboratory School, University of Chicago. *Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy*, ed. D.C. Phillips [Vol. 2]. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 455-458.
- Kozulin, A. & Gindis, B. (2007) Sociocultural theory and education of children with Special Needs: From defectology to remedial pedagogy. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky* H. Daniels, M. Cole, & J. V. Wertsch (Eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 332-362.
- Leont'ev, A. N. (1981) *Problems of the Development of Mind*, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Luria, A. R. (1932/1960) *The Nature of Human Conflicts, Or Emotion, Conflict and Will: An objective study of disorganization and control of human behavior* [Trans and Ed. W. Horsley Gantt], New York: Grove Press.
- Office for National Statistics (2015) Population and migration. Go to: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/compendiums/compendium-of-uk-statistics/population-and-migration/index.html>
- Poddiakov, A. N. (2005) Coping with problems created by others: directions of development. *Culture & Psychology*, 11(2), 227–40.
- Radzikhovskii, L. A. (1987) Activity: Structure, genesis, and unit of analysis. *Soviet Psychology*, 25(4), 82-98.
- Ratner, C. (1998) Prologue. In: *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky: Volume 5: Child Psychology* R. W. Rieber (Ed), M. J. Hall (Trans), New York: Plenum, v-xv.
- Reed, M. (1986) Sound and system. In: S. N. Tchudi (Ed) *English Teachers at Work: Ideas and strategies from five countries*, New Jersey: Boynton/Cook, 195-200.

- Reed, M. (1999) Læring gennem interaktion (Learning through interaction). In: D. Cecchin & E. Sander (Eds) *Liv & Læring*. Copenhagen: BUPL, 138-157.
- Reed, M. (2004) Write or wrong? A sociocultural approach to schooled writing. *English in Education*, 38(1), 19-36.
- Reed, M. (2008) Distributing agency by developing classroom activity. *Educational Review*, 60(2), 187-207.
- Robbins, D. (2004) Guest editor's introduction. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 42(4), 3-6.
- Roth, W-M. (2007) The ethico-moral nature of identity: Prolegomena to the development of third-generation Cultural-Historical Activity Theory. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 46, 83-93.
- Rubtsov, V. V. (2005) V. V. Davydov – the founder of scientific school and director of the Psychological Institute. *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, 3(2), 5-7.
- Scribner, S. (1985) Vygotsky's uses of history. In J. V. Wertsch (Ed.), *Culture, Communication and Cognition: Vygotskian perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 119-145.
- Stetsenko, A. (2008) From relational ontology to transformative activist stance on development and learning: Expanding Vygotsky's (CHAT) project. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 3(2), 471-491.
- Taylor, C. (1985) What is human agency? *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 15-44.
- Varenne, H. & McDermott, R. (1998) *Successful Failure: The school America builds*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Veresov, N. & Fleer, M. (2016) Perezhivanie as a theoretical concept for researching young children's development. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 1-11. DOI: 10.1080/10749039.2016.1186198
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978) *Mind in Society: The development of higher psychological processes* M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, E. Souberman (Eds), Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1986) *Thought and Language* A. Kozulin (Ed), Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1987a) *Psikhologiya Iskusstva* [Psychology of Art] M. G. Yaroshevsky (Ed), Moscow: Pedagogika.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1987b) Thinking and Speech. In: *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky, Volume 1 Problems of General Psychology* R. W. Rieber & A. S. Carton (Eds), N. Minick (Trans. and Intro.), New York: Plenum Press, 39-285.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1929/1989) Concrete human psychology. *Soviet Psychology*, 27(2), 53-77.

- Vygotsky, L. S. (1994) The development of academic concepts in school aged children. In: R. Van der Veer & J. Valsiner (Eds) *The Vygotsky Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 355-370.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1998) *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky: Volume 5: Child Psychology* R. W. Rieber (Ed), M. J. Hall (Trans), New York: Plenum.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1999) *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky: Volume 6: Scientific Legacy* R. W. Rieber (Ed), M. J. Hall (Trans), New York: Plenum.
- Webster, A., Beveridge, M. & Reed, M. (1996) *Managing the Literacy Curriculum: How schools can become communities of readers and writers*, London: Routledge.
- Yaroshevsky, M. G. (1989) *Lev Vygotsky, (Outstanding Soviet Psychologists)*, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Zaretsky, V. K. (2015) L.S. Vygotsky's principle "One step in learning – A hundred steps in development": In search of evidence. *Kul'turno-Istoricheskaya Psikhologiya [Cultural-Historical Psychology]*, 11(3), 44–63.
- Zinchenko, V. P. (2011) For the eightieth anniversary of the birthday of V. V. Davydov (1930-1998): The experience of thinking about thinking. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 49(6), 18-44.